

THE CRISIS IN ENGLISH.

The meeting of the N. E. Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools in Boston, October 9, was devoted to English, and many members of our Association accepted the special invitation to be present. Following is a brief summary from pencil notes :

DEAN HURLBUT of Harvard disclaimed all responsibility for the topic, which struck him as a "scare head." Being on important committees which have not yet reported, he was wary of premature specific recommendations. However, he thought the present "a rare opportunity for improvement in our instruction in English." He gave a brief lucid review of the requirements in English during the twenty-five years of their development. "Nearly all the Harvard books (in the new req. for the anticipation of English A) will be found in the 'open list' of the National Conference, but without the long gaps in lit. hist. of that group-rq. The effect of this rq. is the same as the old rq.—to force the establishment in High Schools of classes in College English. Speaking only for myself, not for the dept. of which I am a member, I think the final object of this new rq. is to secure thoro co-operation between the college and the schools. There are two sides, on one of which the college should have the decisive vote ; on the other, the schools: the college should say *what* studies shall be offered; the schools, *how much* in a particular subject. There are now too many subjects—the so-called enrichment has led to confusion, to mental indigestion. It is a qu. in my mind whether boys are any better trained now than on the old rqs. I doubt if they are so well trained. . . A subject that cannot get counted for admission will not flourish in a school; and college students will not willingly study subjects that do not count for a degree. . .

There is no doubt that the adm. rq. has been steadily screwed up. Every single dept. that has had an adm. rq. has got a little more in the new deal,—and they have got it out of the poor children. . . But Eng. is dif. from all other subjects,—Eng. is prescribed by nature; and the final question is this: With what training do we expect youths of 17, 18, and 19 to emerge from school? The Harvard requirement implies it, but should state it distinctly:

1. A knowledge of gram. and the principles of rhetoric. [to say.
2. Ability to say grammatically and correctly what they have
3. Some knowledge of the history of English literature.
4. Some acquaintance with the masterpieces of that literature.

And this is the outline of no more than should fit into the course of study of any High School pupil, whether going to college or not."

What the West wants in Preparatory English — PROF. F. N. SCOTT, *Univ. of Michigan*. "I wish that the word 'preparatory' might be dropt from our educ. vocab. In hist., sci., and foreign lang. I yield to the judgment of others; but 'preparation' for examination in Eng. cannot fail to lower the value of the study. In the West the evil is minimized to a considerable degree by the certificate system — accrediting schools by regular inspection, etc., — so that there is one broad highway from the Kindergarten to the University. . . Since, however, there are a few pupils in all western high schools 'preparing' for eastern colleges, the W. is forced to face a problem not of its own creating, and has to conform to the E. in an embarrassing conflict. . .

The evil effects of 'preparing' for examinations on the teacher, the pupil, and the course of study : 1. It distorts the teacher's standard of values. The duty and privilege of his high calling is to estimate the ability, the personal worth, and promise of the pupils under his direction — not to teach a language, but to draw out personality. But if, instead, he keeps one eye on his class and another on the exam., he is bound to acquire a squint, his sense of personal values is distorted, he accepts a standard of conformity, he gives up educating just to 'prepare,' to coach. 2. No one can deny that teachers in the E. are more occupied in getting particular boys into particular universities than in the W. Failure to get boys in is a judgment on the teaching. Do not such conditions take the heart out of the work in Eng., and do not the pupils' ideals and standards suffer accordingly? 3. It is upsetting the order of studies to turn the senior year into a coaching review; for the prescribed books, if not all reread in class are certainly written about in the senior year, — the froth and ravelings of the adolescent mind. Conventional character sketches, outlines of poems, etc., are neither good compositions nor conclusive tests of the candidate's acquaintance with lit. . . The accidents of examination are not fundamental elements of education. One result of the reform would be the disappearance from the secondary course of methods and devices whose sole purpose is to meet the convenience and idiosyncracies of examiners.

Let us assume that the word 'preparatory' has been dropt — what course will contribute most to mind, character, and power?

Freedom from prescription immediately opens opportunity for more individual methods. The choice of books at will throws upon the teacher the responsibility of the pupils' gain or loss. As it is, the only operative force is the entr. exam. — the bean-pole that holds up the beans. Another of our educational fallacies: the apprehension that some one with a big axe will cut down the bean-pole! But Sec. Educ. will go on as usual: good schools will continue to turn out good pupils, and poor schools poor pupils; and an equal proportion of both kinds will continue to get into college. A great gain will result from drawing a perpendicular line thru lit. and compos. — instead

of being in the present entanglement, they will be side by side; then we can the more readily find out (1) how much the pupil has profited by his enjoyment of lit. — how much he knows of the essential facts of lit. hist.; and (2) how clearly he can express himself on some subject in which he has some interest, and of which he has some personal knowledge. . . Apply the test of pragmatism to the careers of those 'divine savages' whose English was indecently exposed in the Harvard report some years ago — where are they now? In jail? Social outcasts? Or are they successful lawyers, persuasive insurance agents, leaders of society? To magnify spelling, punctuation, and the dictionary, is to turn education upside down. What we want is the cultivation of direct and free communication with our fellow men, the ready appreciation of great literature. What the West wants is what the E. wants: sympathetic, broad-minded, well-trained teachers. Give us good teachers, and good pupils will follow as the night the day."

The Separation of the Test in Literature from that in Composition.—REV. H. G. BUEHLER, *Head Master, Hotchkiss School*. "The obvious need of reform should not make us withhold our gratitude for what the old rqs. have already done. 25 y. ago neither lit. nor compos. had a standing; now both are clamoring for an independent standing. It is too late to discuss the advisability of dividing the test—the Conference is already considering how to administer the division. There is now a horizontal line, dividing the lit. for compos. purposes into 'books for reading and practice' and 'books for study and practice.' Briefly stated, the argument for the substitution of a perpendicular line is this: The present union of lit. and compos. leads to confusion in the teaching and in the exam. Lit. as handmaid of compos. has deprived compos. of most of its natural field. To be sure, it is natural for some to write compositions on lit.; but literary topics inspire only a small part of the great body of expression in which we wish to train our pupils."

The Needs of Pupils who are not going to College—ALFRED M. HITCHCOCK, *Public High School, Hartford*. . . "That college-bound pupils differ from those who stay at home, there is little question. The former, as a rule, are better timber, come from better stock, are more ambitious, more willing to submit to severe discipline because impelled by a definite purpose; and their capacity for hard work increases as they near graduation time; they are more homogeneous than the stay-at-homes, who are stay-at-homes because poor, or but moderately endowed intellectually, or without ambition, or because they see a way to useful, honorable careers through avenues other than college. Therefore, the needs cannot well be identical.

There are certain lines of drill, we agree, which all should follow, and may well follow together. . . But by the end of the second year, certainly by the end of the third year, there may well be segregation — not for the purpose of separating the dull from the bright, but for the purpose of grouping pupils according to their needs.

For those who are preparing for college, with a possibility of four more years of study, I can conceive of nothing much better than the course of study prescribed by the colleges. . . . On the whole, it is a strong, sensible list. I like it. Nevertheless, I am strongly of the opinion that, excellent as the required readings are, they do not fully meet the needs of many who are destined never to advance in education beyond the high school. They need far more. . . . Does turning a senior division into a sort of literary club for comfortable, leisurely study, seem unscholarly, suggestive of superficiality? It may be un-American, but I think it sensible; and if valuable, why is not such a course equally appropriate for those who are preparing for college? Why not give them an outline history of English literature? Why not carry the club idea into all divisions, and take time for more leisurely study? First and last, because there is no time to take, nor can there be till entrance requirements are lessened all along the line.

. . . . I recognize no crisis, unless it lie in the danger that instead of remedying a few superficial defects with harmless simples, the knife be rashly applied to what is vital. Results are not satisfactory, but the fault does not lie in the recommendations of the Vassar Conference, nor in the more recent group innovation—the so-called open list. The seeming failure is due, rather, in part to the times; in part to poor teaching all along the line; in part, I fear, to imperfect wisdom of those who draft entrance papers. . . . The general plan followed now for so many years I believe is sound in principle. I hope there will be no sweeping changes.”

Discussion — PROF. W. L. CROSS, Yale, Chairman of the sub-committee of the National Conference on reorganization, advocated a break, not total separation, between comp. and lit.; the restoration of Eng. gram. in the H. S.; and the intro. of translations of the Classics early in course, and of books of travel, sci., and hist. for reading books. He believed in segregation, mistrusted a text-book in lit. hist., and thought Prof. Scott exaggerated the differences betw. Eng. instruction in the E. and the W. *We* test the candidate's knowledge and training; in the W. an inspector does the testing—what is the fundamental dif.? Tho there was a strong protest against study books and the open list a few years ago, now colleges and schools in N. E. seem to be in favor of both; the colleges favor a test in grammar, the schools object to it; but both are in favor of separate tests in lit. and in compos.

PROF. GARDINER, in charge of the Entr. Exam. in Eng. at Harvard, reported that about three-quarters of the 1908 candidates stuck to the subjects they had been prepared in; but one quarter tried the new (non-literary) topics, and succeeded admirably. He cannot see that the teaching is any worse in the E. than in the W.—cannot tell the dif. betw. E. and W. students by their writing. Gave student testimony of how the prescribed books often inspire love of reading. Believes examinations good for schools and good for students.

PROF. NEILSON, Harvard — “You all admit that before there were any Eng. rqs., there was little Eng. in the schools; and that since the adoption of Eng. rqs., there has been a great improvement in school Eng. If examinations are an evil, why then didn't school Eng. improve before? Is inspection any more satisfactory than examination? What can an inspector learn of the knowledge and training of pupils from casual visits? Good teachers may be teaching inadequately under the embarrassing visitation; and poor teachers often have on hand ready-made inspector lessons when that official appears.